

THE QUESTION OF REFRESHMENT

A QUOTATION from an address by the Grand Master of Manitoba, Canada, has been brought to our notice which in part we reproduce here:

"Should not the same caution be used in tyling the door of the banquet room as is used in tyling the door of the lodge? . . . To me the refreshment hour is as much a part of the lodge meeting as the ceremonies of the lodge room. Its standard of excellence should be as high as that in the lodge room, its atmosphere should be refining and the tenor of all addresses and entertainments should be educational. "Let innocent mirth be there in abundance; let us have wholesome song and humorous story; but let it be always understood that at the table of a Freemason impurity of thought, speech and conduct are prohibited. "At these gatherings there are always Masonic toasts, and they should not be proposed or responded to in the presence of strangers . . ."

In the United States the Masonic banquet has in general fallen from its high estate. It seems in most cases to be regarded as something to be explained away or excused; there is a feeling that a lodge that gives "feeds" is following a course that is verging on impropriety, that in so doing it is derogating from the dignity of the Institution. In short, the underlying assumption is taken for granted apparently, either that the lodge has a non-attendance problem which it seeks to palliate by bribing members with something to eat, or else that the members are not interested in Masonry but only in the pleasures of the table.

Just how this conception came to arise is difficult to say. Elsewhere in the world the Masonic banquet is still regarded as an integral part of the meetings of the lodge, and this usage goes back to the time when Ashmole attended the lodge held at the Mason's Hall and enjoyed "a Noble Dinner prepared at the charge of the New-accepted Masons." And it is as equally certain that this early glimpse of the Craft gives us a picture of neither a new institution nor an innovation in custom. The Ascetic and the Ultra-Puritan may desire to forget the body and its needs, but it is quite certain that not only must it be fed at frequent intervals, but also that to do so is normally one of the pleasures of life. Men have always felt this. When we wish to enjoy the society of our friends we invite them to dine with us. It is not just that they may satisfy their hunger, it is not to gobble the food down as if there were not enough and we were anxious like pigs at a trough to get all our share and if possible more, it is not so much what is eaten, but the eating together, the customary conventions and the conversation, that gives pleasure.

It is probably because the special conventions of a Masonic feast have been so completely forgotten in this country, that the hour of refreshment is looked at askance. Even the ordinary rules of courtesy seem frequently to be forgotten. It has been the experience of not a few brethren visiting a lodge to find that there is a mad scramble for the first seats at table, in which they are completely forgotten. The manners of a quick lunch counter do not lead to brotherly love, or to more intimate social intercourse. There is absolutely no need for this sort of thing; it is entirely in the hands of the Master and Wardens to remedy

it. They will in very few cases have to do no more than suggest a better way, and their brethren will be only too glad to take it.

Many men join the Masonic Fraternity with the desire of finding brotherly intercourse, and to have an opportunity to enter into closer relations with their fellows than every day life normally affords. How many are deeply disappointed ? New organizations have been formed with little other real object in view than to satisfy this human need, and they, too, as they succeed grow unwieldy, and again the individual is lost. It is in the lodge that Masons should find brotherhood - and there they would find it if the wheels of the degree mill were allowed to slow down and more attention paid to cultivating brotherly love. And no machinery is better adapted to this than the Masonic banquet.

At the present time when Masonic education is attracting so much of the attention of the rulers of the Craft, it might be well worth the while of some Grand Lodge committee charged with this work to adopt manual for the guidance of lodge officers in this social side of the lodge with the definite purpose of reviving the ancient forms and usages of the Craft while at refreshment. This ceremonial is just as old, and just as much an original part of Freemasonry, as anything in the "work" of the lodge, and were it revived it might go far towards solving, indirectly, a number of the problems that are facing the Order in the United States at the present day.

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